

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 10468

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (TINDEMANS), PARM, BE, US

SUBJECT: VISIT OF PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS, DISCUSSION TOPICS:
ARMS LIMITATION

REF: BRUSSELS 10322

1. A MAJOR SECTOR OF BELGIUM'S HIGHLY INDUSTRIALIZED ECONOMY IS THE FABRICATION AND EXPORT OF FINE MACHINERY, OF WHICH HIGH-QUALITY LIGHTARMS AND MUNITIONS IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT. IT ALSO DOES A LIVELY BUSINESS IN REFURBISHING AND RE-EXPORTING HEAVY CONVENTIONAL WEAPONRY. THE ARMS BUSINESS MEANS MORE TO THE BELGIAN ECONOMY THAN IT DOES TO MOST OTHER WEAPONS-PRODUCING COUNTRIES.

2. BELGIUM FINDS ITS CLIENTS EITHER IN DIRECT COMPETITION WITH OTHER ARMS PRODUCERS OR AMONG STATES WHICH, FOR POLITICAL REASONS, PREFER TO DEAL WITH A SMALL COUNTRY. THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT CONTROLS THE EXPORT OF ARMS AND MUNITIONS REASONABLY FIRMLY AND FORBIDS EXPORT OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO SOUTH AFRICA AND RHODESIA. THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY INFORMED OF THE PRESIDENT'S MAY STATEMENT ON THE NEW U.S. ARMS SALES POLICY (BRUSSELS 5385). IT HAS NOT COMMENTED FORMALLY ON THAT POLICY.

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3. THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT HAS ON OCCASION ARGUED THAT ITS WILLINGNESS TO SELL ARMS TO COUNTRIES SUCH AS LIBYA HAS PROVIDED THE WEST WITH A MEANS TO CONTINUE TO EXERT SOME RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON THE PURCHASER AND ALSO A MEANS TO KEEP SUCH PURCHASERS FROM TURNING TO THE SOVIET BLOC FOR WEAPONS.

4. IN DISCUSSING ARMS SALES AND TRANSFERS IN WASHINGTON THE

BELGIANS CAN BE EXPECTED TO ENDORSE U.S. OBJECTIVES. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THEY WILL BE WARY OF SELF-IMPOSED RESTRAINT. BELGIUM WILL WILLINGLY TAKE SUCH STEPS ONLY IN THE CONTEXT OF AN EFFECTIVE WORLD-WIDE PROGRAM. IT WILL AVOID RESTRICTIVE MEASURES THAT MIGHT MERELY REDOUND TO THE COMMERCIAL OR POLITICAL ADVANTAGE OF COUNTRIES, WHETHER EASTERN OR WESTERN, THAT PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE SOURCES FOR WEAPONS. IN OTHER WORDS, BELGIUM IS APT TO BE A FOLLOWER RATHER THAN A LEADER IN TRYING TO RESTRAIN ARMS TRANSFERS, AND WILL EXAMINE ANY PROPOSALS WITH A CRITICAL, IF NOT JAUNDICED, EYE. THIS PREDISPOSITION WAS NOT IN ANY WAY DIMINISHED BY THE U.S. POSTURE ON ARMS TRANSFERS TO ZAIRE DURING THE SHABA INVASION. CHAMBERS

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Message Attributes

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